

Lois M. Nitch 9 Basswood Court Rocky Hill, CT 06067 (860) 257-4334

I am the parent and legal conservator for Andrew J. Puglisi who lives in a group home at 10 Sunburst Drive, Southbury, Connecticut and attends Torrington Day program both run by Oak Hill.

Andy has cerebral palsy, cortical blindness, behavior disorder and epilepsy all of which require trained staff to help with his daily living i.e. preparing his meals, giving him his medication, bathing, personal hygiene and safety at home and in the community.

When Andy was 3 years old there was a bill proposed to educate disable children. The bill later became a law requiring towns to educate disabled children from 3 years 8 months old to 21 years of age. The law requires that a town must find the most appropriate, least restrictive, safe environment for the disable child and if they do not have the proper facility they must buy time and space in another town or State. At that time Newington (where we lived) did not have any programs in place for children with disabilities so Andy was bused to the Aiken School in West Hartford at the age of 3 years 8 months old. Andy stayed in this program for two years to return to the Newington School system in a regular classroom for the next 5 years thru 3rd grade. He went into an EMR classroom in the Newington Middle School until it was determined this was no longer meeting his needs. The town of Newington then helped us place Andy in the Newington Children's Hospital School in a physically handicapped class for 3 years and when this program could not longer meet his needs Andy went to Perkins School for The Blind in Watertown Massachusetts. After arbitration with the town of Newington Andy continued his education passed his 21st birthday thru the summer at Perkins School.

Coming home to live was no longer an option and with more arbitration we turned to the State of Connecticut for help and hired an Attorney to help us with placement for Andy. Andy became a name plaintive in the Mansfield lawsuit. The state looked into different agencies to come up with the best placement for Andy and decided that Oak Hill would be the best placement for Andy and a program was created to meet his many needs.

As Andy's parents we had to make some very hard decisions to keep him safe and to find the right programs to help this young man develop to the best of his potential.

Andy's life is an example of what hard work and persistence can achieve. He is healthier and happier than I could have ever imagined. I am deeply concerned that all the time and effort and cost of giving Andy every opportunity possible will all be in vain should the current programs not get the funding needed to keep the quality of care at a high level.

From the time Andy was a little boy, I worked hard to ensure he would have an excellent quality of life and my dreams have come true. The non profits have been grossly under funded for the past 20 years, please do not destroy Andy's life by cutting funds for the group homes and day programs run by the non-profit organizations.

Perhaps it is time to present another bill that could become a law to protect disabled individuals after their 21st birthday and provide them with the quality of life they deserve.

Thank you,

Lois M. Nitch

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Parent/Conservator/Chair Person Parents & Guardians Advisory Committee Oak Hill